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RUSSIAN FORCES CONSOLIDATE HOLD OVER GROZNY. Russian forces gained ground in Grozny on 8 February, advancing toward the city's southern fringe as artillery and warplanes continued to bomb Chechen positions, AFP reported. Chechen military spokesman Aslan Maskhadov insisted that his men have no plans to abandon Grozny. A Chechen presidential spokesman told Interfax on 8 February that Dzhokhar Dudaev's forces still possess "substantial amounts" of heavy military equipment. He reiterated that Dudaev is ready to conduct negotiations with the Russian leadership "at the corresponding level." -- Liz Fuller, OMRI, Inc.

NEW OSCE DELEGATION TO RUSSIA? A French Foreign Ministry spokesman said a new Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe fact-finding delegation should be sent to Chechnya, AFP reported. Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev has been very supportive of the organization. "We understand that the Chechen conflict casts a shadow on Russia's foreign policy. Nevertheless, Russia is seeking closer interaction with international organizations, including the OSCE. This organization is gaining momentum and we intend to expand our cooperation with it," he told ITAR-TASS on 8 February. -- Michael Mihalka, OMRI, Inc.

NATO LOOKS SOUTH INSTEAD OF EAST, DESPITE CHECHEN WAR. NATO Secretary-General, Willy Claes admits the Chechen war has put increased pressure on its Eastern flank. Claes, who has recently been meeting with representatives of East European and Central Asian countries, said "NATO expansion was the most important item on the agenda--so no doubt there's more pressure, and I've told the Russians this." He added, "The more President Yeltsin makes strong speeches against enlargement, the more the nations of Central and Eastern Europe are knocking at my door." Poland's ambassador to Belgium, Andrzej Krzeczunowicz, said, "Chechnya won't change the pace of expansion...but [it] has changed the climate. People are more aware that the political environment is unstable and that changes in Russia may not be irreversible." The New York Times reported. But Claes cited the Caucasus situation as one reason to redirect NATO's interest southward. "The situation in the Middle East and in the southern parts of the former Soviet Union is so serious that we have to increase our efforts to cooperate with the countries around the Mediterranean Sea," Claes told the Belgian newspaper Tijd. -- Michael Mihalka, OMRI, Inc.